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*On the application of the Characters of the Roman Alphabet to
Oriental Languages.—By Capt. W. NASSAU LEES.*

I cannot call the paper I am about to read to you this Evening a "scientific paper," and perhaps I owe this meeting some apology for reading it within these walls: but the name of our illustrious founder is so often associated with the question which I have discussed, and the subject is so intimately connected with the labours of such distinguished members of our Society as James Prinsep, H. H. Wilson, E. Thomas, E. C. Bayley, General Cunningham, Babu Rajendra Lall Mitra &c., that I have thought it would not prove wholly uninteresting to you.

The substitution of the Roman for Oriental alphabets is a question that about some thirty years ago occupied the attention of educationists and others in India. It did not make much progress at first, nor find favour outside missionary circles; and for a long time the subject would seem to have slumbered. Within the past few years, however, it has occupied the attention of certain distinguished members of the German school of Orientalists; Sanskrit books have been printed in it; and Dr. Sprenger, an eminent Arabic scholar, well known in India, has written two able and interesting articles in the *Augsburgh Gazette*, which within the last few weeks have been republished in Calcutta, advocating the change, as one necessary to enable the languages of the East to become the vehicles of conveying western ideas to the people of this country. As long as the discus-

sion regarding the introduction of the Roman alphabet, into India, was confined to missionaries, it was not necessary for us to meddle with it; but when it is taken up by such high authorities, as those who are now interested in it—and has been removed, as it were, from the arena of controversy, considering the important bearing it has on the intellectual progress of an empire containing very many millions of souls, it is one that ought not to be treated lightly; but in a sober and philosophic spirit, such indeed as that adopted by my esteemed friend Dr. Sprenger, in his paper alluded to.

In considering every question, however, in which a variety of interests are involved, or which is peculiarly liable to be acted upon by circumstances outside and foreign to the end ultimately to be arrived at, it ought to be a *sine qua non*, that prior to its discussion, that end should be so fixed and determined, that we shall know exactly what we desire to accomplish, and that during its discussion the arguments used shall tend solely to that finite point where *proof* of the proposition or theorem proposed for demonstration can be found.

Now in the discussions on the subject of romanizing the Oriental alphabets carried on many years ago, the parties engaged in them had far too much of the character of partizans to arrive at any sound conclusion. Dr. Sprenger has fallen into error in supposing that Dr. Tytler, the two Prinseps, and Sir Charles Trevelyan, were in accord in these discussions. They were wholly opposed; but their opposition may be traced, I think in a great measure to partizanship. In those days there were two schools of educationists in India—the orientalist and the anglicist. The former, in these discussions, was represented by James and Thoby Prinsep and Dr. Tytler. The latter by Messrs. Macaulay and Trevelyan, Dr. Duff and other missionaries. The question they fought, though nominally the battle of the alphabets, was quite as much a battle of languages, and this question has perhaps also been too much mixed up with the real one by Dr. Sprenger.

Missionaries again,—and I do not suppose they make any secret of it,—advocate the adoption of the Roman alphabet, rather because they believe it will aid them in the work of conversion, than from a conviction of its greater suitableness for the purposes of writing oriental languages, and from that source, therefore, we can hardly look for wholly unbiassed conclusions.

A third class would adopt the Roman in preference to the Oriental

characters, because books printed in them could be sold cheaper, and to this school belong, I believe, all German orientalists who are in favour of the change, except perhaps Dr. Sprenger himself. The Germans, it is an admitted fact, are the best Oriental scholars in the world. Indeed, it is almost impossible to find a Sanscrit scholar now, who is not a German; and it is a grave disgrace to England and to India that such should be the case. They buy a very great number of Oriental books, and they would naturally like that the price of these books should suit their purses. I would not, however, be understood to allude to the learned Lepsius. His papers deal chiefly with unlettered languages. Nowhere would cheap books be of greater advantage than in India, but admitting the fact, we must admit also that *that* is not the whole, nor yet the main part of the question we have to decide. Every one will readily grant that it would be an immense convenience, and an immense advantage, to have a universal alphabet—if to the difficulty of learning a new language, we had not to add the difficulty of learning a new and perhaps complicated system of letters, bristling with hooks and points. In short, since the general introduction of steam navigation and rail-roads, &c., the idea of a universal alphabet seems quite natural. Nay, since almost all civilized nations, though thousands of miles apart, can now communicate with each other, by means of electricity, it seems strange that we should not ere this have had,—not a universal alphabet; but a universal language,—so strange that were Julius Cæsar to rise from his ashes, and to ask why all the world were not speaking and writing Latin, we should be somewhat puzzled for a ready reply. In regard to language, the curse of Babel would be a convenient if not a sufficient answer; but in the matter of the alphabets we could not unfortunately excuse ourselves so easily. It will not be a waste of time then to inquire why such has not taken place; and first I will state that I propose to look at the question, not as a theological, a philosophical, or an educational question—nor a question of expediency, nor of policy, nor yet one of price; but one simply of sounds and symbols: and viewing it as such, it does not appear difficult to assign reasons why the Roman alphabet could not take the place of all the alphabets which are now used in India with advantage to the languages themselves or the people who read and write them.

Dr. Sprenger, in his article, has given us illustrations from the

Arabic alphabet ; but though he has dealt only with this one character, his proposal seems to be more comprehensive. In India, however, though we have a great many alphabets, all are off-shoots of two parent stems, or possibly in the remotest antiquity of only one. These two great progenitors of the large family of alphabets and modifications of alphabets with which medals and inscriptions have furnished us, are the *Pali*, or the true primitive alphabet of India, and the Phœnician, or Phœnico-Babylonian alphabets. Reading briefly the historic records of these alphabets, so far as they go, we find, that though the limits of the *Pali* language and its alphabets are not very accurately known, from the widely extended range over which *lât* and rock-cut inscriptions in this character have been found, we must concede to them an extensive domain. These inscriptions are chiefly to be found in the central belt and northern part of the Peninsula, and they carry us back 2,400 years, or to about 550 B. C. though probably the characters of this alphabet may have been in use at a much earlier period. The pure Sanskrit element would not seem to have made its appearance in India for several centuries later, or rather I should say, we have no *rock-cut* record of it. Coexistent with the *Pali* alphabet, which occupied the central division of India, for at least 250 years B. C., were the Bactrian alphabet of the North-Western, and the Dravidian languages, (apparently without any written characters) of the southern division of the Peninsula, the limits of the former extending almost to the confines of Persia, and those of the latter from the Vindian hills and the river Narbudda, to Cape Commorin. The early history of the Dravidian colony and their languages, is somewhat obscure ; but there is internal evidence in the structure of some of their languages, viz. Tamil and Telugu, to prove that, though they have occupied the South of India from very remote ages, they were of Scythian origin, and it is assumed that they entered India by the same route as the Sanskrit-speaking people. Their languages then, though at present not wholly unallied to the Indo-Aryan family, are not of them ; but their alphabets would seem to have been remotely derived from the same models, though how they came to differ in their existing forms so widely is not clear. That they are more modern does not admit of a doubt, but for the rest the matter is involved in much uncertainty. The points regarding which we are left in the dark are—When did the Sanskrit-speaking colony

come, and when they did come, whom did they find in India? Was it the original tribes of the country, and did they exterminate them so completely as to leave not a trace of their language—or was it an earlier emigration of Scythian colonists, and did they drive them southward before them so effectually as to leave no land-marks of their occupation behind them? These are questions admitting of much argument; but which I must leave to be discussed by those whom they concern—the students of language and ethnology, and turn again to our alphabets.

The Bactrian alphabet, on the contrary, owes nothing to the Indian model. It has been satisfactorily established that it is one of the many off-shoots from the Phœnician parent tree.

Now the Phœnico-Babylonian alphabet is the most ancient of which we have any historic record. Monsieur Renan in his *Histoire générale des langues Semitiques*, (probably following Gesenius who some twenty-five years previously had expressed a similar opinion,) thinks there is evidence sufficient to shew that the Hebrews wrote in this alphabet on going up out of Egypt. I cannot say any thing for or against this surmise; but be it as it may, there is little doubt that modifications of this alphabet were in spontaneous use from the banks of the Indus to the straits of Gibraltar, by the people of the whole world as it was known to the ancients, about the eighth century before Christ. From it the Greek alphabet was modelled; from it the Aramaic, the Syriac, the Hebrew, the Arabic and the many modifications of these alphabets have sprung; *and from it, also, we have the Roman alphabet.*

It would be impossible in a brief, hurried, and imperfect memorandum, such as this, to give even a cursory outline of the history of the progressive development of these alphabets, even if I had full materials for the purpose; which is not the case. For a long time we had no better guide than Gesenius' work, published now some thirty years ago; but Dr. Levy's *Phonizische Studien*, and the duc de Luynes' valuable tables printed by Mr. E. Thomas, and since published inscriptions, have added much to the world's knowledge on this subject, which is at once so interesting and instructive to the palæographer, the philologist, and the historian. But still light is required,—more light,—and it is satisfactory to know that able scholars are deeply engaged in investigating the comparative palæography, as well as its

cognate subject, the comparative philology of Eastern languages. The East it is now acknowledged must be the starting point with all who would study the history of man as well as the science of language, and the art of writing. The last mail received from England, brought the announcement of the publication of no less than two books which promise to be of great value to all who are interested in these subjects, *Levy's Phoniziches Worterbuch*, or a sequel to his *Studien*, and *Spiegel's Eran das Land Zwischen der Indus und Tigris*, and our German oriental students work with such a will in the fields of oriental research, that we may confidently expect each year to increase our store of information. Whether they will succeed in finding Abraham, Zarathustra, and the leader of the Aryan colony which overran India, sitting under the same fig-tree, framing languages and alphabets for the whole world, is a question yet admitting of very great doubts, but there is no doubt that if ever they have done so, and left any traces behind them, our friends will find them.

Assuming the correctness of the facts above stated, it will be seen that excluding the immediate consideration of the Pahlawi and Zend alphabets, we have two primitive alphabets to deal with—the Indian and the Phœnician; and from these two alone the very numerous alphabets of almost of all the written languages of Europe, Africa, America, and half of Asia have been drawn.

We have the very best evidence moreover, viz. clearly written inscriptions on tablets, coins, and rocks,—to prove that many of these derivative alphabets are of very great antiquity, and this of itself, though not a practical objection to the substitution of a good for a bad, or a perfect for an imperfect alphabet, must nevertheless always present a very serious difficulty to the engrafting of *new* alphabets on *old* languages. Most nations take an intense pride in the antiquity of every thing belonging to them; and no nations possess this characteristic in a greater degree than Oriental nations. This difficulty, of course, is much heightened if the character in which the language is written, as well as the language itself, is sacred, which is the case with the two classical languages of India. It is almost superfluous to mention that the Brahmanas are of divine origin; that the language of the *Vedas* is the language of the gods; and as for their alphabet, its designation, the *Deva Nagari*, renders it unnecessary to say whence it has been derived. As if to give weight again to

their ideas regarding the antiquity of the Hindu era, its cycles have been elaborated into a system of *yugas*, which carry us back to ages quite sufficiently remote to satisfy the most ardent votary of the geologic theory.

Nor if we pursue the enquiry in the opposite direction, do we find greater encouragement for the reception of a change of alphabets. We cannot trace the Koran to its origin, for it was not created. The doctrine is one of the most noted heresies of Islamism. The *Koran* is co-existent and co-eternal with the Supreme Being, written in the Arabic characters on the *lawh i Mahfuz*, or sacred tablet, which is guarded by the angel Gabriel. As regards the Koran, moreover, an especial virtue is inherent not only in the words of the text; but in the actual letters in which they are written, for the *book* would not be the Koran, if transcribed in any others.

To obtain sympathy or support, then, from the *learned* in India, for any system that proposes the *general* substitution of a foreign alphabet for those they have been led to consider as sacred, I look upon as impossible. But were it possible, the difficulty of inducing any people to accept a new alphabet for the purposes of ordinary reading and writing, when they have one which they have used for centuries, which is already familiar to them, and which they find to answer all the purposes of life, is of itself of sufficient magnitude, to render it unwise in the advocates for so great a revolution, to encounter any obstacles that might be avoided. As an illustration of this minor difficulty, I may instance the Greek, the German, and the Russian alphabets, all of which still exist in certain portions of Europe, to the exclusion of the Roman alphabet, which has been adopted in all other countries. Some years ago indeed it was proposed to the Greeks to adopt the Roman characters; but the patriarchs rejected the idea with scorn. In Germany it has frequently, I believe, been attempted to introduce the Roman letters more generally, but except in books intended for exportation, the change does not appear to have found favour, and it is a singularly apt illustration of this difficulty, that the very articles in which Dr. Sprenger has so ably advocated the universal adaptation of Roman alphabet to Oriental languages, are printed in the old and familiar German type. Now the difference between the German and the Roman characters is comparatively trifling, and as the powers of the letters are precisely the same, for all practical purposes, the one alphabet

may be considered as good as the other. That the old alphabet then retains its hold on the Germans, furnishes us, in my opinion, with a strong proof of the very great tenacity with which a people will cling to an alphabet, when it has been so widely adopted as to have become familiar to their whole nation. Indeed, if experience is a guide, it would appear easier to change a language, than to change an alphabet.

These difficulties, however, it may be urged are, more or less, connected with the weaknesses of human nature, and may be traced to bigotry, vanity, prejudice, force of habit, false ideas of nationality, &c., all of which might be overcome by a ruling power occupying the position of the English in India; and this is in a great measure true; but admitting its truth, the most important part of the enquiry—indeed, I may say, the whole of the enquiry, will still remain, viz. the suitability of the characters of the Roman alphabet, to represent the sounds to be expressed in all the languages, both living and dead, which are in use in India. I have read a great deal that has been written on the subject, and I must confess that I have never seen this portion of it thoroughly well investigated. Indeed it is far more often settled in a very summary and off-hand manner, by a reference to some system which has already been adopted, and which has been used, it is advanced, with great success. Yet it is of the essence of the enquiry, and until it is satisfactorily disposed of, it is quite needless to refer to the many advantages that would result from the adoption of a universal alphabet, a point which I assume nobody will care to deny. Nor does the fact of a certain currency being obtained for books printed in a particular type prove what is wanting. Many people thought that putting pantaloons on Hindustanis would make English soldiers of sepoys; but it did not do so, a fact which the English discovered to their cost in 1857. After wearing them, father, son, and grandson for a whole century, on the very first favourable opportunity, they tore them off, and cast them away. And why, may I ask, did they do so? Because they found them not so suitable to their habits and customs, and the climate of their country, as the *dhotis* they had been in the habit of wearing for ages. The educated Bengalis have for a quarter of a century been familiar not only with the alphabet we use, but with the language we speak. They speak it and write it infinitely better than they do their own language, yet we do not find that when they write Bengali, they use this or any other

than the Bengali alphabet. How it would be, if the language and the Roman alphabet were familiarized, if I may use the expression, I cannot say ; a great many Bengalis now wear pantaloons, but in the matter of the alphabets experience, as at present available, is not certainly encouraging to a change.

It is surely not unnatural, that a people, after labouring for centuries to compass an important end, to invent and elaborate a system of signs and combinations of signs, and to apply them to every sound in their language, and having accomplished it, should be unwilling to resign that which had cost them so much time and trouble. The Deva Nagari alphabet, if it is the most elaborate, is also the most perfect alphabet in the world. It was modelled and improved from the Pali or most ancient Indian alphabet expressly for the Sanskrit language ; it was fashioned for this language ; it was made to fit it, and therefore it does fit it better than any other ; and it is a singular coincidence, that this fact attracted the attention of, and was noticed by the very remarkable Chinese traveller, Houen-thsang, upwards of 1000 years ago, and from his memoirs, I make the following extract :—
 “ Les caractères de l’écriture ont été inventés par le dieu Fan, (Bramâ) et, depuis l’origine, leur forme s’est transmise de siècle en siècle. Elle se compose de quarante-sept signes, qui s’assemblent et se combinent suivant l’objèt ou la chose qu’on veut exprimer. Elle s’est répandue et s’est divisée en diverses branches. Sa source s’étant élargie par degrés, elle s’est accommodée aux usages des pays et aux besoins des hommes, et n’a éprouvé que de légères modifications. En général, elle ne s’est pas sensiblement écartée de son origine. C’est surtout dans l’Inde centrale qu’elle est nette et correcte.”

It is unnecessary to go into a comparative analysis of the two alphabets to establish the truth of these remarks. The coat that is made for a man is likely to fit him better, than the coat that is made for somebody else, and this, it appears to me is, if not the whole question, certainly the major part of it. “ Yet” it will be urged by progressists, “ fashions may change, and it would be unjust and a hardship, to condemn an ancient friend always to appear in his antique costume, because it had once, when in fashion, been made to fit him.” I answer, that if it becomes him better than any other, it would be a far greater hardship, to make him change it to suit the taste or to please the eye of foreigners ; but even if he agreed to put on a new

coat, you would still be obliged to make one to fit him, and herein lies a very great difficulty." I consider it to be a fundamental principle of the art of palæography, that the power of each symbol should be so determined that its euphonic value in all combinations of symbols shall be fixed and not variable, as is the case with the Roman alphabet, as it has been adapted to English and some other modern tongues; that these values should be readily ascertainable, and that, as far as possible, distinct phonetic values should be represented by distinct symbols and combinations of symbols, and the same always by the same, wherever they occur. Now if we investigate the history of the progressive development of alphabets, we will find that while these rules have been steadily kept in view in the adaptation and modification of alphabets in the East, they have been systematically set aside in most modern languages of the West; and the result is, that while an educated Eastern gentleman, seldom or never makes a mistake in orthography, few Englishmen or Frenchmen can trust themselves to write their own language without a pocket dictionary at their elbow. There are again numerous letters in the Deva Nagari alphabet, for which we have no corresponding signs in the Roman alphabet, and many sounds in the former language of which no combination of the letters of this alphabet will convey to the ear even an approximate idea. And the same may be said of all the alphabets and languages derived from this source, and also, though in a less degree, of the Arabic and Hebrew alphabets. All attempts to express certain letters in the Arabic alphabet in Roman characters have failed, and for obvious reasons all future attempts will fail likewise. In short, if it be proposed to make the alphabet of any one language the basis of an alphabet for another language, its capabilities and powers must first be carefully examined with reference to the requirements of that language, and its redundancies eliminated, or its deficiencies supplied, as the case may require. This was the course adopted by the Brahmans in regard to the primitive alphabet of India, in the second and third century B. C., and this was the course adopted by the learned Lepsius in the 19th century A. D. when propounding his scheme for a missionary alphabet. He did not set up the doctrine that *any* existing alphabet, much less the Roman alphabet with its twenty-six letters, was perfect, in the universal application of the term. He assumed rather the converse, and the plan he adopted was as follows:—

Having first arranged all the sounds prevailing in the known languages of the world, to these he applied the characters of the Roman alphabet as far as they would go, and for those sounds for which he could not find corresponding signs in the Roman alphabet, he indented on other alphabets, or invented new ones, adapting thus his alphabet to his languages, not *vice versâ*.

But if no existing alphabet is so perfect as to be made applicable to all existing languages, speaking generally, the alphabets of most languages which have received such a development as to entitle them to take rank as literary languages, and all those which may be distinguished as classical, have been so far perfected in relation to these languages themselves, and their symbols and sounds have become so closely identified, that any attempt now to dissever the one from the other, especially in the case of dead languages, would result in very serious consequences—indeed consequences so serious, in my opinion, as to give grounds for alarm, lest the true phonetic values of the original letters should soon become irremediably confused, and in the revolution of epochs, the languages themselves might be lost. This is a view of the case that will perhaps be disputed, yet it is one which will, I am sure, be clearly intelligible to all who have occupied themselves with decyphering ancient inscriptions, and are consequently aware of the stumbling block those inscriptions prove to archæologists, and numismatists, in which a language, foreign to the transcriber, has been rendered by the ear, in a character equally foreign to the language in which it is written.

I venture to consider it proven then, that the Roman or any other modern alphabet, cannot be applied to any of the dead or living languages of India for which an alphabet has been already perfected, with advantage to those languages, and that any attempt to do so, except in so far as the transcription may suit the convenience of foreigners and ripe scholars, would only lead to very great confusion.

It remains, however, to enquire whether, setting aside those languages, and *patois*, which have not been reduced to writing, we have no languages which have received a considerable development, but for which no written character, original or adapted, has been perfected. And here our attention is at once arrested by a language which is somewhat peculiar in its characteristic—a language which is written in many characters, yet which has no alphabet of its own; which has an ex-

tensive vocabulary; yet few words in that vocabulary can be said to belong to it; which is at once the most widely spread, the most popular, and the most useful of the languages of India, yet of which there is no definite form or dialect that can properly be called a language of any part of India; which cannot be developed without losing its identity, and yet which wanting, as it is, in all these, the attributes of a perfect language, has a grammatical structure which is essentially its own, and which it carries with it into whatever other language it may be merged. The language I allude to, is that which is commonly called Hindustani. It is the *lingua franca* of Hindustan, and is so universally familiar, that many I dare say will say that my remarks are paradoxical, and some that they are absurd. I venture to think that they are neither the one nor the other. But, as few will feel disposed to accept my simple word for the fact, I beg to offer the following explanation. The Hindustani language, as now existing, can hardly be called an independent language,—a language which springing from an original and ancient source, has existed, first in a primitive and rude form, and by a gradual and progressive development, always preserving its original basis, has finally received a polish, and been imbued with an elasticity, such as to make it a suitable medium for the expression of complex ideas. It cannot be said to belong to the Aryan; it certainly does not belong to the Semitic; it does not belong to the Scythian family of languages. It is a language, the elements of which are drawn from all these sources. The basis, that is the grammatical structure of Hindustani, if ever it was Sanskrit, is now so distinct from it, as to possess quite a character of its own, and its vocabulary is made up from languages both of the Aryan, Scythic, and Semitic families. It is so far then a composite language, but inasmuch as languages of distinct and separate origin will not readily mix, the moment any attempt at attaining a high degree of development is made, a conflict of elements takes place, which generally ends in the complete overthrow of one and the merging of what is called simple Hindustani into languages which, while they preserve in a great degree their Indian structure, indent for their vocabulary either on languages purely of Aryan, or purely of Semitic origin. This conflict is mainly attributable to the cause here assigned, the hostility of the primitive elements, and possibly of the races, but there can be little doubt that it is greatly fostered and encouraged by the maintenance of a double alphabet, and

the difficulties of fusing these opposite elements, into a composite language, in the ordinary acceptation of the words, would be considerably diminished if an alphabet could be invented that would be common to both.

The Deva Nagari alphabet is quite as unsuitable for expressing Arabic and Persian words, as the Greek alphabet is unsuitable for expressing Sanskrit words pure and derivative, and the language as now written, presents as *bizarre* and *outré* an appearance, as if a language composed of English, German, and Russian words, was written in Hebrew characters. In most composite languages, such as English or the Romance languages, the whole forms an amalgam in which sometimes, the original materials can be recognized with difficulty, and often not at all, as all will be aware who have read Dean Trench's works on the English language. But in Hindustani it is different, the materials, particularly those of Semitic origin, remain exactly as they were, and it is the same with modern Persian in regard to its Arabic words, which Sir William Jones has well illustrated in the following passage. "This must appear strange to an European reader; but he may form some idea of this uncommon mixture, when he is told that the two Asiatic languages are not always mixed like the words of Roman and *Saxon* origin in this period, 'The true law is right reason, conformable to the nature of things, which calls us to duty by commanding, deters us from sin by forbidding;' but as we may suppose the Latin and English to be connected in the following sentence: "The true *lex* is *recta ratio*, conformable *naturæ rerum*, which by commanding *vocet ad officium*, by forbidding *à fraude deterreat*." But the difference in the case of Persian is, that it and Arabic have a common alphabet while the two languages of which Hindustani is chiefly composed, have separate and distinct alphabets.

The obstacles again to fusion under present circumstances are greatly increased by distinctions of race and creed. Without entering into nice ethnological distinctions, it will be sufficient to consider that we have in India two great classes to deal with, Hindus and Musalmans. The former, in writing Hindustani, use the Deva-Nagari, or one of its derivative alphabets; the latter generally use the *Nas Tâliq* or Persian character. Neither know the characters in which the others write, and as the races are prevented by religious differences from intermixing, there is neither inducement nor necessity

for improving their acquaintance with each other's customs in this respect. When letters pass between two educated gentlemen of different race and creed in India, though written in what may be called the mother-tongue of both, they must be taken to the village scribe to be read. This certainly is an anomaly—an anomaly which does not exist perhaps in any other part of the world. But we have not yet reached the end; we are introducing railways, telegraphs, and all kinds of mechanical power into India, and we are teaching sciences bristling with technical terms. A medical student who may be unable to speak a word of English, will glibly run over half the Latin terms in the pharmacopœia of medical science, and any ordinary native gardener will give the Latin botanical name for every tree and flower in a well-stocked garden. We have here, then, not an alphabet seeking for a language; we have a language seeking for an alphabet. It has greater natural claims perhaps on the Deva Nagari alphabet than upon any other, because the language, in its ancient dialectic form must have been closely allied to the Sanskrit, and the present Deva Nagari alphabet was formed from the Indian alphabet; but certain portions of the frame-work of the language are so distinct as to be deduced with difficulty from Sanskrit, and if English, Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian words are to be adopted into the language, and one of the three alphabets is to be selected to be a common alphabet for all races who use this language throughout the country, the balance, on many grounds, is in favour of that alphabet which is used by the most highly civilized people—the ruling power.

Certainly very great difficulty would attend the inaugural measures of a comprehensive change of the kind; but these I need not discuss here, further than to add that any attempt to accomplish so great an end, must be made gradually, and with much caution.

But besides Hindustani, it must be borne in mind, that there is a very wide field that the Roman alphabet may occupy at once. I allude to the very numerous dialects which we find in all parts of India to which the civilization of the Budhists and Brahmins have not penetrated. In the province of Assam and neighbouring districts, we have eight different dialects which, are stated to be distinct languages,* having no affinity with one another.

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| * 1. Garow. | 5. Abor. |
| 2. Naga. | 6. Mishmee. |
| 3. Booteah. | 7. Kamptee. |
| 4. Khassiah. | 8. Mikir. |

This is probably a mistake ; but these languages are still so distinct as to be a bar to intelligible inter-communication. In addition to these, there are numerous dialects, presenting, for the most part, the characteristics of the central-Asia type of languages ; but all differing from each other in a greater or less degree, and almost all not yet reduced to writing. The same remarks are applicable to Birmah proper, British Birmah, Pegu, the Tenasserim Provinces, Chittagong and Akyab.

The great majority of the languages here alluded to, having no affinity with Sanskrit, the Deva Nagari alphabet cannot be said to have any peculiar claims on them. The Missionaries on the North East frontier have adopted the Roman characters in their teachings, while the Missionaries on the South East frontier have adopted the Burmese characters. Now, much may be said against teaching uncivilized tribes a character that will not enable them to carry on business relations in writing with their neighbours ; but if it is ever intended to apply the Roman alphabets to *any* of the languages of India, the best languages certainly on which to experimentalize, are those to which no alphabet has yet been naturalized.

The Missionaries in British Birmah are making very rapid progress with the instruction in Burmese and the conversion to Christianity of the Karens, and the Welsh Presbyterian Mission at Cherrapoonjee are printing some books and a dictionary in the Roman characters. The Education Department in Assam first adopted the books of the Missionaries, but have discarded them, I believe, for books printed in Bengali type. The question therefore ought to be authoritatively settled, or we shall see, what it must be confessed is not uncommon in India, one generation taking infinite pains to do that which the next will take equal pains to undo.

The conclusions then at which I have arrived are, that any attempt to adopt the Roman alphabet to the classical languages of India would be mischievous ; and that all those languages for which an alphabet has already been perfected by the people speaking them, have no need of such a change ; but that an attempt might be made to adopt this alphabet, or a modification of it, to all Indian languages which at present have no alphabet which can properly be called their own.

